

Kansas Cattlemen Speak Out About New Traceability System

Representing more than 1,700 Kansas producers, Kansas Cattlemen's Association (KCA) expressed deep concerns with the initiation of USDA's new Animal Disease Traceability System.

Attending the Kansas City meeting put on by USDA in mid-May, KCA confirmed that there are many aspects of the system that are unresolved and questionable. First and foremost, it is inappropriate to mandate and regulate a system that is not workable.

KCA encouraged USDA to not mandate any ID and traceability program that is not producer driven.

"Our organization and our producers have been engaged in helping USDA and our state's working group to provide the best disease prevention and control suggestions possible. We have been engaged because our industry could be devastated by a mandated program put in place by those without knowledge, understanding, and a vested interest in the U.S. cattle industry. We have been at the table and have been engaged in dialogue, because we do not want a program forced on producers that will create injustices such as those within the NAIS program. KCA has provided workable solutions and recommendations to rectify flaws within programs initiated by USDA, and KCA whole heartedly supports disease prevention," commented KCA Executive Director, Brandy Carter.

KCA recommendations included 1) focusing on disease prevention, 2) only tracking test eligible cattle (not feeder or stocker cattle), 3) the utilization of metal tags similar to the "Bangs Tag" or brands 4) records be based off of producer address and not a premise, and 5) any data base be held at the animal health department at the state level and not at any federal level.

KCA insisted that disease prevention is a key element to any system. By allowing cattle to enter the United States from countries that have Brucellosis, Foot and Mouth Disease, BSE, or other contagious and devastating diseases, the USDA has failed to take the most important step of disease prevention.

KCA addressed the book end approach that USDA has regularly mentioned. USDA has a theory of tagging an animal in one state and being able to identify that animal in another state when disease is determined. However, USDA has no workable solution for tracking the movement of that animal through multiple states and multiple herds without infringing on producers' rights.

KCA expressed appreciation to USDA for reaching out to producer groups and providing the individual states with regulating their own program but shared concern regarding the consistency of any program implemented.

Acknowledging that producers most affected by this system will be those selling at the livestock market, KCA warned that this will put the brunt of accountability on smaller cow/calf producers and increasing their cost of production; this will also burden the livestock markets which will ultimately be tagging the majority of cattle coming into the facility. Not only could this negatively impact the amount of business the markets retain, but also burdens the markets with increased labor costs.

Additional issues regarding this program include who will oversee this program whether intrastate and interstate, how will the system be enforced, and what will the consequences be to producers for non-compliance.

It was expressed by the USDA, that it intends to begin the preliminary rule writing process this summer, have it available for comment this fall, provide a 90 day comment period, and have the final rules implemented and the program in place by late next year. KCA contends that it is neither in the best interest of USDA, U.S. cattle producers, nor the U.S. cattle industry to put a system in place without knowing how or if it will work.

“In theory, the KCA letter states, USDA’s Animal Disease Traceability System looks good. However, an acceptable and workable plan must be put in place for any theory to be successful. That is not the case here. U.S. producers and the U.S. cattle industry do not need any more regulations that will drive U.S. producers out of business. Therefore, Kansas Cattlemen’s Association cannot support USDA’s efforts to impose a mandatory, unworkable, unfinished animal disease traceability system. However, KCA will continue to sit at the table and be involved with discussion so that the voice of the Kansas Cattleman can be heard.”